

Hallie's Heart

Chapter One: Let's Talk About It:

1. In the first days following Mona's move to Stewartville, she has a clear awakening to how different life would be in a small town where small "comings and goings" become big news. Her heart tells her this move will "change her life in ways defying explanation." Can you recall a time when you felt led to make a move or a big decision that didn't make sense to anyone else but you?

2. As she learned how to run an antique business, it shocked Mona "to discover that families would sell off the mementos that had given shape to their lives, no matter how insignificant." When do mementos help us in our lives? Is it possible that some mementos could harm us?

3. We begin to learn in Chapter One that Mona has not had a good relationship with her father. His "piercing eyes should have been enough to send a chill through her bones," even in the wilting summer heat. How can experiences with our parents or others color the way we see situations in our daily lives? Do they color the way we think God sees those events? Do they color the way we see God? In what ways?

4. Mona reflects that "Things hadn't zipped along according to plan in the year-and-a-half since the shop had become hers. There *had* been a plan. It was just coming together more slowly than she'd expected. Of course, that hadn't surprised her friends, and especially Ellen, who could never be called a friend – just a sister."

Mona's friends seem to know that she is capable of making ambitious plans that might take longer than she anticipated, and they accept her as she is. Her sister Ellen, however, is a sister, but not a friend. Do you have family members who are not also friends? What could be stopping those friendships from forming within your own family?

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Chapter Two: Let's Talk About It:

1. Hallie's dad tells her, "*Someday, when you're my age, you'll realize that most rules are optional, especially the ones that get you where you want to go.*" In our society there are many rules that are spoken as well as rules – like social or cultural “rules” – that are unspoken. Which rules are not optional? Which rules are optional? How can rules move us forward? How can they hold us back?

2. You can choose to believe in some optional “rules that get you where you want to go,” like “doing what’s right for you, in spite of what anybody else thinks” or “if anger works be angry” or “if silence works be silent” or “if money helps you forget, work eighty hours a week.” Is it OK to do what’s right for you, in spite of what anybody else thinks? Do you use anger, silence, excessive work (or excessive play, drinking, eating, etc.) or other methods that might hurt others to control situations or feelings in your life?

3. Mona longed to be with Hallie as she always had, and “offered to drive down from Stewartville,” but Ellen, Hallie’s mom, refused to let her come. “Hallie had always been able to count on Aunt Mona, and her mom hated them both for it.” What would make Ellen “hate” them? How could she make a decision to change her feelings?

4. Hallie knew that her Aunt Mona would pray “the kind of prayers that made you feel like God was right next to you.” What kinds of prayers would make you feel like God was right next to you? Is He? When you pray, do you talk to Him knowing that He knows, understands, and wants to listen and respond?

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Chapter Three: Let's Talk About It:

1. In the days following Stacy's death, Mona had decided to close up her beach house, knowing that "...her home would someday find its way back into her life. She didn't doubt the time would come. The only question was when." Was Mona making a wise choice? A selfish choice? A needed choice? Why?

2. When Ellen first discovers that Hallie is missing, she exclaims, "She's run away! I can't believe she'd do something like this to us." Is this an appropriate response from Ellen? Is it OK for Ellen to be concerned for herself, as well as her daughter? Why or why not?

3. Mona answers her sister's frantic words about Hallie being missing with a calming declaration that "God knows where she is, and He's watching over her." Ellen responds in a chilling tone, "I hope not the same way He watched over Stacy. I think this family's had more than enough of *His* help." Does God's will equate to our safety? Are there times when His will is more than we can accept or understand? If so, what do we do to continue moving forward in the midst of pain we cannot understand?

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Chapter Four: Let's Talk About It:

1. Hallie's father puts money in Mona's bank account to help cover costs she might incur while she is spending time with Hallie to deal with her choice to run away. Mona wonders why it sparks a "flicker of resentment in her heart." What would make Mona feel resentment about this?

2. As Mona ponders her own feelings of resentment, she hears a voice inside of her say, "*You can't accept the thought that you might need anyone except God for anything.*" What would make Mona want to trust only God and not others for her needs? Is this how we should interact with God? With people?

3. Mona prays, "There are no coincidences, Lord, I know that. You're in this, and You were in it before Hallie decided to run. Thank You for Phil's generosity. Thank You for putting Dan on the beach at the crack of dawn for who-knows-what reason, and for giving him the common sense to call me." Do you believe there are no coincidences?

4. Mona continues her prayer, thanking God, "...for giving Ellen and Phil the grace to let me go to Hallie first when there's no good reason they should." Do you think that God gave Ellen and Phil this grace? Do you think He can work through someone, even if they don't want Him to?

5. Once again Mona speaks with God, as she struggles through the impact of Stacy's death on herself and her family, including Hallie. "*I've got to give her to you, Lord. Both of them, actually – well, I guess all of us, if I'm honest. We're all struggling to really believe that Stacy's death wasn't just a huge accident. We all want to say that if we'd just done one thing differently, it wouldn't have happened. We're all drowning in our own guilt.*"

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I only know that if Jesus didn't come to free us from guilt and shame and sin and mistakes and all the pain of our life, then there's nothing about the Christian life that's worth anything. Give me strength through Your truth and the power of Your Spirit to walk in this. Help me to help Hallie believe that she can see herself the way You see her in all of this; that it's hard work, but You've already done the work for us. And help me to believe that Your love can overcome my sister's bitterness and hate. We're in this together, and I'm asking You to help us believe that You're there with us, whether we see it or feel it or not."

How do you see yourself? Do you think this is the way God sees you? Is He present in all of your feelings?

6. In Mona's prayer, she speaks very openly to God about her feelings and requests for help. Is this how we should talk with God? Why or why not?

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Chapter Five: Let's Talk About It:

1. Hallie's dad calls Mona's house and ask to speak to Hallie. "That her dad wanted to talk would mean one of two things to Hallie. Either her mother had freaked out so badly that she couldn't be rational, or her dad was so angry he was insisting on speaking to Hallie himself. Neither scenario would make her want to rush to the phone..."

What would make a mother freak out so badly she couldn't be rational? What would make a dad so angry? Are those appropriate responses? What might be the real feelings behind a "freak out" or anger?

2. Hallie's dad surprises her with honest words about needing her back – really needing *her*. She begins to cry, responding, "I don't think the old Hallie is in there anymore, Dad. If she is, I don't know where to find her. I thought maybe I could find her here, where I lost her."

Is it possible to lose ourselves? If so, is there any good that comes from losing ourselves?

3. Hallie's dad continues speaking to her, "We love you Hallie. Your mom and I want you to know that more than anything. We'll do anything to help you, if you'll just tell us what it is."

Why is it so hard for us to tell others what we need? What could Hallie's mom and dad do to encourage her to talk more openly? Should she tell them why she hasn't? Is it all their fault?

4. Mona tells Hallie, "...at the end of this, you're going to have to face what drove you here. You ran away because you're tired of running away." As we sort through our feelings what takes more energy – facing things or running? Should we always face things immediately? Why or why not? Should we expect others to face things immediately?

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Chapter Six: Let's Talk About It:

1. Mona goes to God again as she continues to deal with the situation surrounding Hallie's pain. *"Lord, I know we could all be swallowed alive by the "what ifs." It's only by Your grace that I haven't. I don't know why You allowed Stacy to drown, why all the details of that day had to fall together in that precise order. I don't know why I had to forget the sunscreen or why there had to be a riptide that day. I don't know why Hallie had to watch her sister drown, but I believe you chose to allow us to endure this because You knew it could change us in some way You could use."*

Do you have any "what ifs?" If so, are they God's truths, or could they be Satan's lies? A "what if" from God might sound like, "What if I choose to stop worrying and trust God?" A "what if from Satan might sound like, "What if I fail and things turn our badly?"

If you have a "what if," write it out and turn it into a statement that sounds like something God would say to you.

2. At one time Hallie believed God was in control of the world and had a special plan for her life. But Stacy's death began a process in her mind of changing her beliefs. Remember those old cartoons where a devil sits on one shoulder speaking, and an angel sits on the other? Satan's lies are rarely bold up front. More often they come in pieces, whispered in our ears as he hangs around on our shoulders waiting for opportunities. What lies might Satan have been whispering in Hallie's ears at each opportunity when he found her vulnerable?

3. Satan's lies took root deeply in Hallie's mind. How do we uproot the lies of Satan and replace them with the truth of God?

4. Hallie asks Mona openly about whether or not she had ever forgiven her father for giving away her mother's things. She tells Mona that "Some things people do aren't worth forgiving." At that moment, Mona saw the power of the lie strangling her niece's heart."

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Mona answers Hallie's question about forgiving her dad with a revealing statement. "Maybe I'm still forgiving him." What does that mean? Is forgiveness something you do once and then put the experience behind you?

5. Is there someone you are in the process of forgiving? Are you moving forward in the process? Has it meant facing it more than once?

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Chapter Seven: Let's Talk About It:

1. Mona was deeply disappointed that she didn't win the sideboard for her customer at the auction. But later, at a yard sale down the road, she found it at half the price. Have you ever experienced a loss or a disappointment, only to find something better down the road? How does that affect the way you look at losses you may face in the future?

2. Throughout the story Mona's friend and store employee, Elsie, speaks a little more gruffly than she needs to. She also has a hard time accepting compliments, but has a way of showing her appreciation by saying, "Well then." Is it always necessary for you to expect people to voice their thoughts or gratitude in ways you find acceptable? If the people in your life don't speak the way you wish they would, how can you respond to them? How can you keep certain responses or lack of appropriate responses from affecting you in negative ways?

3. At the end of Chapter Seven, Mona is left smiling and reflecting, "Who would have thought that a day that started with rotten hamburgers and dead bugs could change so suddenly?"

When a day starts badly, it can seem like it all goes downhill from there. But does that have to be the case? It has been said that "in one moment you can change your mind, and in that one moment you can change your entire day." Can you? Is this always true? How much of that decision is up to God, and what part do you play in it?
